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CASSANDRA TO: Report on BMus(Hons) Thesis

THESIS MARK AND GRADE: **64%** = High Pass (*not a* Credit).

The thesis is satisfactory in its presentation. However, there are various flaws therein:

A. It is completely unacceptable to provide a thesis title consisting of merely 3 words ("Breach the Niche"), which, in this instance, cast absolutely no light whatsoever upon what the thesis is actually about. Its title requires a sub-title to do exactly that.

B. A significant proportion of the thesis, Appendix B (pp.50–93), consists of a *verbatim* transcript of interviews of six composers – all of whom happen to be teachers in the Composition Unit (this is not a criticism, although I do wonder why Ms To chose not look farther afield). These interviews are the source-material upon which most of the remainder of the thesis relies. However, Ms To's interview methodology is fatally flawed:

(i) It is unacceptable to present a *verbatim* transcription of recorded interviews, which include all of the interviewees' hesitations, 'ums' and 'ahs' etc., and even spoken grammatical errors.

(ii) Following discussion with Dr Michael Smetanin, it appears that none of the interviewees were provided with a list of questions to ponder over beforehand. Such questions could either be identical, or tailored, for each interviewee. In any event, no such list is proffered anywhere within this thesis.

(iii) None of the interviewees appear to have been accorded the opportunity to review a draft copy of their interview, with a view to polishing or rewriting some of their replies for the sake of clarity, or to correct spoken errors, etc.

C. I am both astonished and appalled that an Honours thesis, from within a university of all places, contains any **basic** punctuation errors (such as an ignorance of the proper use of possessive apostrophes), grammatical mistakes involving "its" (possessive pronoun) or "it's" (a truncation of "it is"), and grammatical bloopers concerning homophones (e.g. confusion over "there", "their", and "they're"). In 1985, when I wrote my own Honours thesis at the University of Sydney, the manifestation of **any one** of these linguistic offences would have resulted – rightly, in my view – in **instant failure**. This sort of linguistic illiteracy should have absolutely no place whatsoever in any venerable, highly respected tertiary institution (respected at both the national and international levels), such as the University of Sydney.

Yours faithfully,



Ian Shanahan, BMus(Hons), PhD USyd.